



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Summary Minutes
November 21st, 2017**

I. Call to Order & Introductions

Randy Stone, Vice-Chairman, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Randy asked for all present to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance and to remain standing for a moment of silence for all of those who have given their lives and those who have been wounded for our country in the different conflicts in which our country has been engaged. A POW/MIA Empty Chair is placed at all official meetings of the Commission as a physical symbol of the thousands of American POW/MIAs still unaccounted for from all wars and conflicts involving the United States of America.

II. Approval of Minutes

A motion was made to approve the October 2017 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the October 2017 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. “Thank A Vet” Social Media Campaign Proposal – Josephine Bahn, Commissioner

Josephine proposed that the Commission spearhead a social campaign titled “Thank A Vet” where members of the community can thank those who have served in the military via video. It was suggested that Veterans also participate by saying when they served and/or telling a story about their service. Participants could submit videos via social media by using a hashtag such as #thankavet. Submitted videos would be patched together to create a montage. If planning for the campaign occurred now it could potentially be rolled out for next Veterans Day. The Commission currently has a Facebook account and the County has accounts on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr. It was suggested the campaign include anyone who has spent time in service. Some servicemembers may not view themselves as Veterans if they did not serve on active duty or if they served in the Reserves or National Guard.

It was suggested that information about the campaign be sent out via Betsy Luecking’s e-mail distribution list. It was also suggested that the Commission reach out to Combat2College at Montgomery College and to Shady Grove Universities to connect with OIF/OEF Veterans. Montgomery County Public Schools could be included to have classes include videos thanking Veterans.

It was reported that Ohene Gyapong, Deputy Director, Public Information Office, would like to meet with some Commissioners next week to discuss this idea and County communications.

It was asked if the County has a definition of Veteran. Mike Subin indicated that the County itself has not adopted a definition. There is a definition used in the criteria for Commission membership, which includes members of the uniformed services (USPHS, NOAA). States and local governments can go above the Federal definition of Veteran, but they cannot go below it. It was noted that Reserve and National Guard members are considered Veterans only if they are activated by DoD under Title 10 of the US Code and they serve 180 days or longer for purposes other than training. If they are activated by the Governor under Title 32, they are not considered a Veteran.

Betsy added that the Justice for Vets organization uses the question “Have you ever served in the US Military, Reserves or Guard?” in order to capture as many Veterans as possible. It was suggested that this question be used in the County’s Mental Health Court, the Police Department’s STEER program, and all Health and Human Services programs to identify Veterans instead of using the current question of “Are you a Veteran?”.

IV. Status of the Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) – Mike Subin

The District of Columbia VA Medical Center (DCVAMC) has pushed back the opening of the CBOC to February

2018. Plans have been submitted in accordance and permits have been approved by Department of Permitting Services. The current issue involves payment and pricing issues with the contractor.

V. Status of the Vietnam Memorial – Mike Subin

The original plan was to have a Vietnam Memorial installed at Wheaton Veterans Park and to have County Executive Leggett dedicate the memorial on Memorial Day 2018. The park is currently maintained by Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) and is scheduled to be taken over by the Department of Transportation in two years. Mike, Dan Bullis, and Betsy met with staff from M-NCPPC yesterday to conduct a site visit of the park. It was determined that the park is not accessible and would require significant Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) renovations. The ramp is too steep and would require it be bulldozed as well as the retaining walls. It does Also, the renovations and installation of a memorial would not be finished in time for County Executive Leggett to dedicate the memorial before his term is over. At this time, it is not feasible to install the Vietnam Memorial at Veterans Park. Betsy contacted David Dise, Director, Department of General Services, to discuss Memorial Plaza as another option as it is already accessible and meets ADA compliance, it has an eternal flame, and has flags already installed.

The County will be responsible for designing the memorial. Mike shared a draft drawing of the Vietnam Memorial. The memorial would have several panels of black granite with the names alphabetically etched on them. There are 131 residents who were killed in action. The letters would be the same size as at The Wall at Omicron font .53”. The dimensions would be roughly 20 feet long and 6 feet high. An additional block of black granite would be set on top with the language “In Memory of those Montgomery County residents killed in action during the Vietnam War”.

V. Update from Commission on Aging – Jim Campbell, Commissioner

Jim Campbell shared the following from the Commission on Aging (COA):

As reported in 2015, 14% of County residents (205,841) were age 60 or greater. Since seniors are projected to be the growing group in the County, the corresponding senior population, by 2040, will be 307,532, almost 50%. Despite myths to the contrary, 18% of the households headed by an individual older than 64 have an income less than \$20,000/year. Housing costs are an economic issue, particularly for renters, 51% of whom spend more than 30% on rent. Homeowners spend 25% of their income on average. Lastly, 38% of the County residents, the majority of whom are women, live alone.

Therefore, seniors are the most vulnerable segment of the County population, and remediate increasingly isolated, particularly from the exploding onset of technology. COA’s primary focus is to provide a safety net of programs to:

- prevent elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation,
- assist and remediate victimized seniors,
- ensure high quality long-term care and community-based services,
- support caregivers,
- provide access to transportation and recreation,
- provide access to affordable health, mental health, and dental services,
- provide financial assistance, and
- provide safe, accessible, and affordable housing.

According to a Washington Post article from October 2017, Montgomery County nursing homes have been rated D+ three years in a row by the Voices of Quality Care. Maryland was also reported as being the 2nd worst in the US for timely investigations of high level nursing home complaints. COA is lobbying the County and State for a long-term care ombudsman. There are currently 5.5 State members who train volunteers to handle complaints made about treatment care and long-term care facilities. They are asking for an increase in staff for at least one more person to provide training and 10 additional trained volunteers. There are 8,000 nursing home residents in the County. COA is also lobbying for a fraud investigator to be added to the State’s Attorney’s Office. It is expected that the mandatory financial exploitation reporting of mortgage brokers will likely increase the workload. COA is asking for an additional social worker for the Public Guardianship Program. The County has seen a 10% increase in

guardianship cases from FY2013 to FY2017. The program currently serves 78 clients age 65 and older, and 36 clients age 18 to 64. COA also recognizes the lack of affordable housing in Montgomery County and has noted that the County is short 50,000 units. They are asking the County consider the Federal low-income tax credit, which is available to the County and to private contractors, in order to offset the cost of requiring long-term facility acreage. Affordable housing is income-based. COA recently held a legislative breakfast with Montgomery County representatives to discuss these issues.

It was noted that the County functionally ended homelessness for Veterans last year. Functional zero means that, at any point in time, the number of Veteran experiencing sheltered and unsheltered homelessness will be no greater than the current monthly housing placement rate for the Veteran population. The VA has given the County a total of 98 HUD-VASH Vouchers for Veterans and amounts to approximately \$2,800,000 per year. It was also noted that the County conducts an annual point-in-time survey of homeless persons in Montgomery County who are residing in sheltered and unsheltered environments. The next survey will occur in January 2018. This information will be shared with the public.

VI. Announcements

Ron Drach, Commissioner, reported that the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) and Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) in partnership with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) will be hosting an online ePolicyWorks dialogue on educating disabled Veterans and employers about workplace rights and responsibilities. For more information, please visit <https://Vets.ePolicyWorks.org>

Jim Campbell, Commissioner, reported that the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) will be hosting a meeting on February 21st, 2018 at Manor Country Club. Special guest speaker will be Rear Admiral Joyce M. Johnson, DO, MA USPHS (retired) who will discuss the history of chocolate.

Betsy Luecking reported that the Commission's role in addressing employment issues for Veterans is to work with agencies, hear their presentations, and offer input. It is not the role of the Commission to find jobs for Veterans. Since the County's hiring preference was implemented in 2012, the County has hired 221 Veterans and 16 of those Veterans have a disability. It should be noted those Veteran hirings were at a time when the County had employment cut backs.

Bill Gray, former Chair, reported that Randy Stone was promoted to Lt. Col.

Jane McCarthy, former Commissioner, reported that she spoke at Towson University on Veterans Day. For Veterans Week, Towson's Military and Veterans Center presents a week of events honoring and commemorating the veterans of the Vietnam War.

Henry Bockman, Commissioner, asked how one can report scam phone calls or e-mails that are soliciting money for Veterans. It was suggested he contact Attorney General Brian Frosh.

Adjournment: 7:30pm

Next Full Commission Meeting: Tuesday, December 19th, 2017 from 6:00pm to 7:30pm at Health & Human Services Building, 401 Hungerford Drive, 1st Floor 1A Conference Room, Rockville, MD 20850

Respectfully submitted:

Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I

Betsy Luecking, Community Outreach Manager